



One Hundred Ninth Congress  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Committee on Homeland Security  
Washington, DC 20515

November 18, 2005

The Honorable R. David Paulison  
Acting Director  
Federal Emergency Management Agency  
500 C Street, SW  
Washington, D.C. 20472

Dear Chief Paulison:

I am writing to you to raise serious concerns over the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) decision to cut off payments on December 1, 2005 to the estimated 150,000 Hurricane Katrina evacuees currently living in temporary hotel and motel rooms. It is not only unfair, but quite impractical to give storm evacuees just two weeks notice to find other housing, especially so close to the Thanksgiving holiday.

While I agree that we need to work toward moving evacuees out of emergency housing into a more permanent setting, FEMA has been slow to develop long-term housing plans. It has failed to deliver trailers to displaced residents, ignored existing federal housing programs, and delayed acting on offers from companies willing to donate houses. FEMA's decision to cut hotel payments will likely exacerbate the worst housing crisis this country has seen in nearly a century and will push many evacuees onto the streets.

I also share the apprehension of apartment industry officials who are worried that FEMA may be dumping the housing crisis into their laps. According to published reports and discussions with my constituents, the information provided to both the evacuee and the apartment owners about housing assistance has been inadequate and has led to significant confusion. Rather than simply putting up fliers, FEMA must develop a serious plan for helping move people from hotels into more permanent housing.

In addition, many officials feel it will be impossible to secure executed leases for all the eligible families within the timeframe your department has laid out. Not only are the housing stocks in affected states severely depleted, but the three-month limit FEMA has placed on leases is much less than the industry norm and many landlords are balking at signing them.

Finally, I am enormously disappointed with FEMA's failure to move expeditiously on the offer by Fannie Mae, made on September 15<sup>th</sup>, to donate 1,500 housing units to Katrina evacuees in Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, Oklahoma, Tennessee, and Texas. Fannie Mae offered, on a temporary basis, homes in its inventory of foreclosed properties for displaced families and individuals struggling to rebuild their lives. Thousands of evacuees many of whom have been repeatedly moved from one shelter to another or far out of the Gulf, would surely welcome the opportunity to create a safe, stable environment for their families that these homes would provide.

Two months after Fannie Mae extended the offer to FEMA, the agency has yet to place a single family in the donated housing units. Indeed, the 18 families that were placed in Fannie Mae all worked through local organizations to secure housing, as FEMA failed them. It saddens me that the federal government remains riddled with bureaucracy months after the hurricane struck, making FEMA unable to negotiate terms to transfer these properties to families in need. Indeed, it was only recently that the agency began acting as a facilitator in putting families in touch with Fannie Mae. The Department's failure to act expeditiously in this matter represents yet another lost opportunity to make things right for the people of the Gulf Coast.

I urge FEMA to temporarily rescind this housing deadline and develop a comprehensive, public plan on how FEMA intends to move these families from hotels to rental properties and eventually on the road to self-sufficiency.

Time is of the essence. Please notify me of your intentions by November 28, 2005.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Bennie G. Thompson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Bennie" being more prominent and the last name "Thompson" written in a continuous script.

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Bennie G. Thompson  
Ranking Member  
House Committee on Homeland Security

cc: Secretary Michael Chertoff, Department of Homeland Security  
Peter King, Chairman, House Committee on Homeland Security